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Colombia: Prospects for Peace

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An Intelligence Assessment

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*ALA 85-10054
May 1985*

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Colombia: Prospects for Peace

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An Intelligence Assessment

This paper was prepared by [] Office
of African and Latin American Analysis. It was
coordinated with the Directorate of Operations.
Comments and questions are welcome and may be
directed to the Chief, South America Division,
ALA, on []

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Colombia: Prospects for Peace

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Key Judgments

*Information available
as of 26 April 1985
was used in this report.*

President Betancur, in a departure from the heavy reliance that most of his predecessors put on military force, is struggling to negotiate an end to the political violence that has plagued Colombia for nearly four decades. Over the past year this effort has produced cease-fire agreements with three of the four major guerrilla organizations and led to formal discussions on a number of possible political and socioeconomic reform measures such as extensive land redistribution. In essence, the guerrillas and the government are in a holding pattern in which the idea of cease-fire simply means trying to avoid sparking major armed clashes. More low-key guerrilla-sponsored violence—especially kidnaping and extortion—has not abated significantly, and we believe this type of activity has eroded popular enthusiasm for the Betancur approach.

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In our judgment, the cease-fires have served the insurgents' short-term interests by affording them an opportunity to rest, regroup, and recruit new members relatively free from harassment by government security forces. Indeed, over the longer term the insurgents' strong ideological conviction and an apparent preference for a life of combat probably will, in our view, limit the number of guerrillas willing to abandon the revolutionary struggle.

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Although Betancur seems determined to prevent the truce accords from unraveling before his term expires next year, we believe he will be increasingly constrained in his ability to make concessions to the insurgents. There is growing congressional and popular opposition to many guerrilla demands, including such basic changes in the structure of the current political system as direct election of mayors. Moreover, we expect the worsening economy to compel the President to backtrack on promises of far-reaching economic and social reforms that would have appeased the insurgents.

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In our view, there is a slightly better-than-even chance that the cease-fire accords will hold at least for the next several months, but that they almost certainly will collapse by the time Betancur leaves office in August 1986. Perhaps the greatest threat to the accords will come from attempts by one party to force the other to negotiate more seriously.

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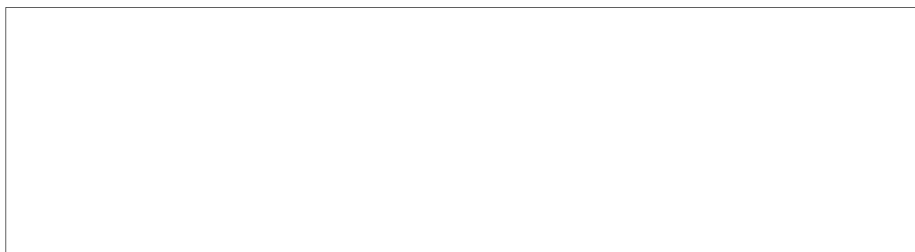
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We believe the military would be able to contain a renewed outbreak of insurgency if the pre-cease-fire situation were reestablished, with insurgent groups operating independently. However, there is an outside chance—perhaps 1 in 10—that the guerrilla groups would unite in a centrally coordinated organization. If this occurred, we judge the armed forces would be hard pressed to maintain government authority in rural areas and simultaneously counter the terrorist challenge in major cities. [redacted]

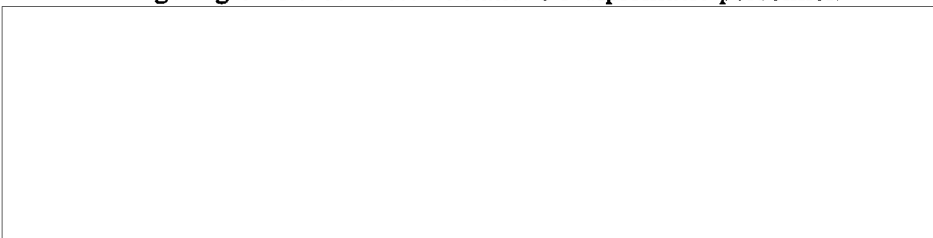
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[redacted] over the last several years Cuba has provided significant arms, training, and funds to one Colombian insurgent organization (the M-19), while urging all groups to unify. The formation of a new, amalgamated rebel organization, therefore, would fulfill a longstanding Cuban policy objective and, in our view, probably would prompt a significant increase in Havana's support. We believe that Havana would take such action even at the risk of dashing the rapidly improving prospects for normalizing diplomatic relations with Bogota. [redacted]

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We expect that any return to full-scale guerrilla warfare would result in intensified targeting of US businessmen and US diplomatic personnel.



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Failure of Betancur's peace program almost certainly will prompt Bogota to look to Washington for increased security assistance, and we believe that any perceived reticence by the United States to respond favorably and swiftly would adversely affect the morale of the Colombian military. It also might embolden the rebels to expand their operations in the belief that logistic shortfalls would seriously constrain government troops. [redacted]

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Figure 1

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Colombia: Prospects for Peace

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Introduction

Since assuming office in August 1982, President Belisario Betancur's actions have underscored his commitment to making peace between the government and Colombia's four principal insurgent groups a major domestic policy objective. In our judgment, the uniqueness of Betancur's approach lies in his emphasis on dialogue, rather than force, as the principal vehicle for ending nearly 40 years of intermittent rural violence. This paper reviews the peace process under Betancur and analyzes his strategy toward the insurgents. It also examines the responses and objectives of the major guerrilla organizations and highlights the key role of the armed forces. Finally, the paper presents likely future scenarios, assesses the prospects for peace, and discusses the implications of future guerrilla actions for the United States' relations with Colombia.

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A Tradition of Violence

Colombia's current insurgent groups perpetuate a history and tradition of political violence and common banditry that have plagued the country throughout most of its modern era. Rural bands identified with the two dominant political parties—the Liberals and the Conservatives—have warred with each other for regional control since the 19th century. At its height, partisan violence, commonly referred to as *la violencia*, resulted in a civil war (1948-53) that claimed some 200,000 lives. The strife only ceased when the two sides agreed to share power in a National Front, dividing patronage evenly and alternating the presidency every four years. Although this formal political pact expired in 1974, its most important features have been preserved in constitutional amendments.

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This solution ended the worst excesses of *la violencia*, but longstanding political resentments persisted and in some cases were heightened by growing economic disparities between lower and upper classes. Since the

early 1960s, according to academic and press sources, the growth of large, poorly managed cities has provided a fertile breeding ground for urban revolutionaries, while conditions in isolated and neglected rural areas generated similar recruitment opportunities for guerrilla bands. Radicalized young people proved especially susceptible to leftist charges that the National Front arrangement, by relegating power to the two established parties, perpetuated an elitist system that condemned the majority of Colombians to a life of poverty and denied legitimate dissenters a role in the political process.

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Betancur's New Approach

Before 1982, the public record shows that most administrations adopted variations of one basic counterinsurgency strategy—ignore guerrilla activities during periods of relative calm and vigorously pursue the insurgents following any marked, but usually temporary, increase in violence. In contrast to most earlier presidents, who did not assign the problem the highest priority, Betancur publicly announced at the outset of his term that achieving a lasting peace with the guerrillas was of paramount importance. Moreover, he dramatically broke with his predecessors by playing down the use of force in favor of a negotiated peace.

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In our view, Betancur's motives reflect a mixture of genuine commitment to peace and politically motivated image building. As a former labor lawyer, Betancur believes in conciliation and consensus, according to the US Embassy, and sees this approach as the most promising avenue for ending the country's protracted civil strife.

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Principal Insurgent Organizations

FARC

With between 2,500 and 4,000 armed members, [] the FARC is the largest and most powerful insurgent group. It was organized in 1966 as the paramilitary arm of the pro-Soviet Communist Party of Colombia (PCC), but this link, according to the US Embassy, became clandestine in order to protect the party's legal status. Its senior leaders—including the notorious "Tirofijo"—have spent two decades in the hills, and, based on their actions, are as much attracted to rural banditry as to ideologically inspired causes. Nonetheless, information [] suggests the FARC is a well-disciplined organization whose members are committed to a long-term revolutionary struggle. []

M-19

The M-19, which is Colombia's second-largest guerrilla group with approximately 850 to 1,000 armed supporters, [] rose to prominence as an urban-based group appealing to disaffected members of the middle class. Under the leadership of Jaime Bateman, its charismatic founder who was killed in an airplane crash in April 1983, the M-19 portrayed itself as a nationalistic, non-Communist organization. It sought to gain public support through such activities as redistributing stolen food among the poor and by linking kidnappings to demands for improved working conditions for the oppressed, according to the US Embassy. The death of Bateman, however, prompted a protracted leadership struggle that we believe continues to complicate the group's dealings with the government regarding the peace process. []

EPL

With an estimated 300 to 600 armed members, the EPL is the smallest of the four major Colombian

insurgent groups, [] It was founded in 1967 as the armed wing of the pro-Beijing Communist Party of Colombia/Marxist-Leninist (CCP/ML) and retains that affiliation. About half of the EPL's members belong to its urban branch, while the remainder operate largely in the cattle and farming regions of Antioquia and Cordoba departments. In addition to raising operating funds through kidnappings, bank robberies, and extortion rackets against both prominent local individuals and narcotics traffickers, the group has begun demanding payments from customs officials involved in lucrative contraband smuggling operations, []

ELN

The ELN—the group currently most active in targeting US interests in Colombia and that has not agreed to the truce—has only about 300 to 800 armed members, but it has won the grudging respect of the Army, which regards it as one of the country's best trained and motivated insurgent movements, [] Founded in 1963 as a pro-Cuban Marxist-Leninist movement espousing anti-US and anticapitalist rhetoric, the group suffered a series of reversals at the hands of the military in the 1970s that forced it to retreat and rebuild. What emerged, [] is a more tightly compartmented organization led by a cadre of former student radicals and peasants with extensive combat experience. The ELN has been particularly active on both sides of the border in the region abutting []

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Figure 2. President Belisario Betancur [redacted]

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[redacted] we believe that Betancur probably calculates that bringing an end to the violence in Colombia would give a powerful boost to a reelection bid in 1990, when he is again eligible to seek the presidency. [redacted]

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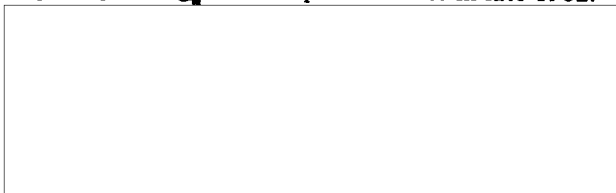
Problems With the Guerrillas

Notwithstanding his motives, Betancur has been handicapped in his pursuit of domestic peace by guerrilla intransigence. After less than three months in office, the President persuaded the Congress to approve a generous amnesty law that included a full pardon for all politically motivated crimes except for non-combat-related murder. According to US Embassy reporting, he also promised economic aid both to facilitate the reentry of guerrillas into society and to address their concerns about promoting rural development. Nevertheless, the four principal insurgent groups openly rejected the entire package. [redacted]

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Undaunted, Betancur created a highly publicized presidential Peace Commission, which began meeting regularly with guerrilla representatives in late 1982.

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Managing the Truce

Betancur's efforts finally yielded tangible results last year with the well-publicized signing of a cease-fire accord with three of the four principal insurgent groups. Agreement was reached with the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) in May, and similar accords were concluded in August with the 19th of April Movement (M-19) and the People's Liberation Army (EPL).¹ The Army of National Liberation (ELN) is the only major guerrilla movement that has refused to sign a peace accord. The agreements, as reported in the press, call for each insurgent group to renounce terrorist activities, but no specific provisions were made for the guerrillas to surrender their arms. In return, the government promised to enact legislation pardoning the insurgents and to seek congressional approval for extensive reform measures.



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Last December, the President ordered government spokesmen to begin a "national dialogue" with the various insurgent leaders. The ongoing discussions since then, according to the US Embassy, are focusing on proposals for direct election of municipal officials, agrarian reform, and increased government attention to improving education, labor conditions, public health, and public services in rural areas. [redacted]

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In managing the peace process, the US Embassy reports that Betancur has had to balance criticism from important interest groups that are distressed by continuing insurgent-inspired violence against his concern that heightened military pressure would cause the guerrillas to renounce the truce. To try to avoid antagonizing the guerrillas, Betancur generally has played down the festering security situation and has avoided blaming specific guerrilla groups for continuing acts of violence, according to the US Embassy. Nonetheless, when the President has judged his credibility threatened, he has not hesitated to react to guerrilla-instigated provocations. He has emphasized publicly the need for law and order and, [redacted]

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25X1 [] has used personal emissaries to warn the insurgents to curtail their activities.

principal guerrilla holdout from the cease-fire—has accelerated its activities, possibly in hopes of laying claim to vanguard status if the peace process collapses completely. []

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The Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC)

25X1 The leaders of the FARC—the largest guerrilla group—apparently view the cease-fire as part of their long-term revolutionary strategy. Last December, the FARC and the government publicly agreed to convert the cease-fire accord signed in May into a one-year truce. FARC leaders promised to use the year to transform their organization into a viable political party, and indicated that if the truce held they would sign a formal peace agreement with Betancur on 1 December 1985. []

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Continuing violence has eroded public support for the President's approach, however, and raised larger questions about his ability to maintain order, according to the US Embassy. A growing public perception that the cease-fire accords have not appreciably curtailed guerrilla-sponsored terrorism—especially acts of kidnapping and extortion—probably will result in a continuing loss of popularity for Betancur. Consequently, we believe the President probably will be forced increasingly to weigh his desire for recognition as a man of peace against the likelihood that a reputation for coddling the guerrillas will tarnish his future political aspirations. []

The US Embassy reports that the FARC hopes to spearhead the Communist Party's plans to unite the country's leftist forces into a strong political front for the elections in 1986 and to woo away disgruntled voters from the two traditional parties. In return,

[] the Communists apparently plan to reward several FARC leaders by listing them as congressional candidates. On 30 March, the FARC formally launched its overt political movement, the Patriotic Union (FARC-UP), and the Communist Party publicly announced it would coordinate with this group to sponsor a national convention this summer at which a leftist presidential candidate would be nominated. []

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Motives of the Major Insurgent Groups

25X1 For their part, the insurgents have motives that mesh well with Betancur's conciliatory approach. []

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25X1 [] the three guerrilla organizations that signed cease-fire agreements with the government are independently pursuing a two-pronged strategy. On the one hand, they are holding peaceful rallies throughout the country and are otherwise seeking peacefully to disseminate their message of protest in an effort to enhance their appeal to those Colombians who are dissatisfied with the established political system and the country's dimming economic prospects. At the same time, all three groups are using their rural strongholds to provide training to new recruits and are engaging in kidnappings and other revenue-generating acts of terrorism, []

Despite these attempts to achieve legitimacy within the political system, []

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[] FARC leaders have no intention of abandoning the armed struggle. The US Embassy reported last October that []

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FARC plans to expand dramatically the number of its fronts and convert the eastern mountain range of Colombia into a guerrilla bastion. Moreover, flareups between FARC troops and government forces occur on a fairly regular basis. In January, for example, []

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25X1 [] arms purchases—funded mainly by terrorist acts—continue suggests that all of the key groups anticipate an eventual return to armed struggle. The ELN—the

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Balance of Forces

Manpower Strength	
Colombian armed forces	
Army	57,000
Navy	6,200
Marines	2,800
Air Force	4,200
Insurgent groups	
FARC	2,500 to 4,000
M-19	850 to 1,000
ELN	300 to 800
EPL	300 to 600

of a Navy base on the Magdalena River in north-eastern Colombia. In our view, the attack underscored the aggressive tactics the group is prepared to use to maintain continuing dominance in its stronghold areas.

Moreover, in addition to antigovernment attacks, the FARC continues to mount terrorist operations designed simply to generate revenue. The organization, is using at least some of the funds derived from its kidnaping, robbery, and extortion schemes to finance its new political activities.

Nor have the peace accords altered the group's involvement with Colombia's illegal narcotics industry. According to the US Embassy, the FARC for some years has cultivated its own illicit crops. It also receives "protection" payments—in money and arms—from drug traffickers within its operational boundaries.

Based on the FARC's stated goals and the group's actions since the cease-fire, we judge that, even if aging senior FARC leaders—all whom are in their fifties and sixties—renounced armed struggle in favor

of a more comfortable life in the political arena, the younger, more militant hardliners almost certainly would push to carry on the fight. One FARC splinter group, the Ricardo Franco Front, appeared in public just days after the parent organization signed the cease-fire agreement.

Other more militant splinter groups may emerge in coming months if FARC leaders continue formally to honor the truce, and we believe this will strengthen pressure from rank-and-file members to resume full-scale guerrilla war.

The 19th of April Movement (M-19)

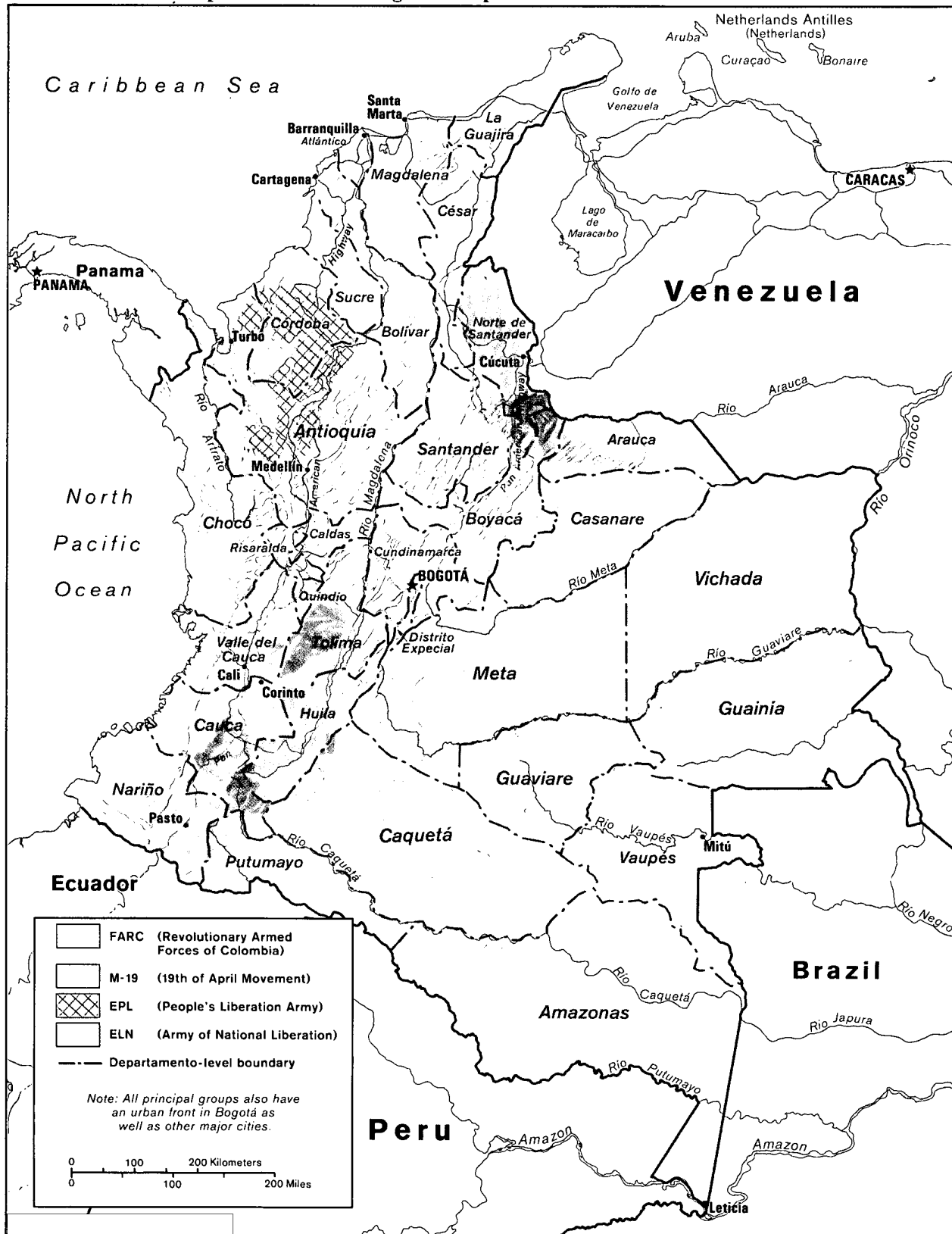
As far as the second-largest insurgent group is concerned, the M-19 hierarchy is divided over whether to continue the armed struggle. Hardliners within the M-19's top leadership have been using their strongholds in Cauca department and elsewhere to train new members, In addition, the M-19 has been successful in recruiting former Army officers and enlisted men to serve as paramilitary instructors.

By contrast, moderates within the group favor gradually turning the organization into a legitimate political organization. Toward this end, the moderates have successfully directed the M-19 to participate in the "national dialogue," trying to strengthen the movement's inroads in the Confederation of Colombian Workers (CTC)—the country's third-largest labor movement—and promising to convert the M-19 into a legal political party. M-19 moderates may also be responsible for the group's promotion of rural civic action programs.

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Figure 3
Rural Fronts of Principal Colombian Insurgent Groups



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25X1 M-19 leaders apparently are also split over whether to establish closer ties with Colombia's illegal narcotics industry. [redacted]

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25X1 The demotion of a major M-19 leader—Ivan Marino Ospina—in February, following his public endorsement of threats by drug traffickers to murder US Embassy personnel, indicates that the moderates have gained the upper hand on this issue at least temporarily. [redacted]

The People's Liberation Army (EPL)

25X1 The EPL—the country's smallest insurgent group—appears to have the least popular support of the four key insurgent groups, [redacted]

25X1 [redacted] Nonetheless, government forces have had little success against the EPL in recent years. Since 1983, EPL-inspired terrorist actions have increased considerably, and the US Embassy recently stated that the group now controls the entire southern half of Cordoba department. [redacted]

25X1 Apparently believing that the Army is limited in its ability to move against the group because of the cease-fire accord, the EPL has become increasingly brazen in forcing rural landowners off their property, openly recruiting, and exacting large sums of money from businessmen. [redacted]

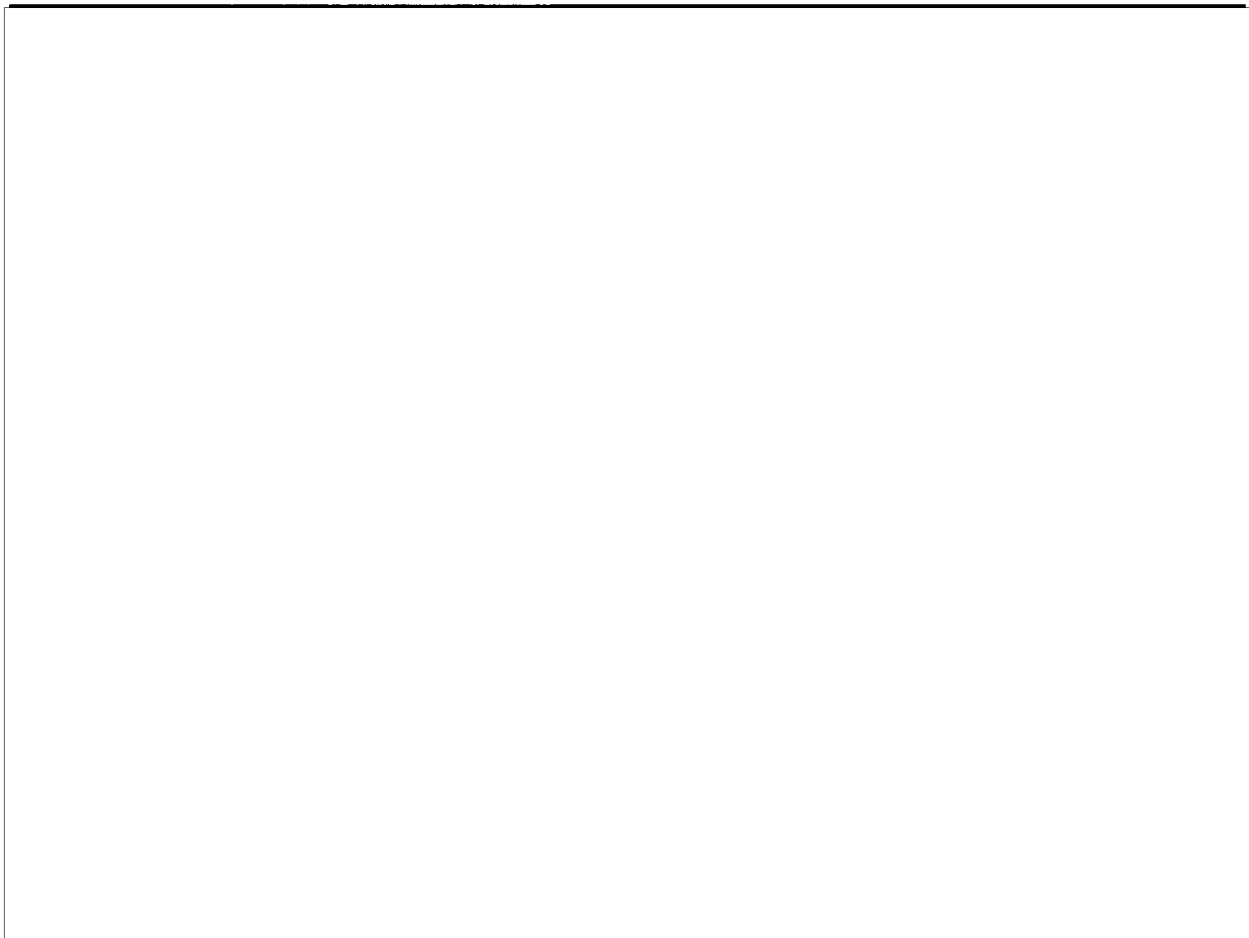
25X1 [redacted] the organization's illegal activities grossed over \$1.6 million in Cordoba alone last year. [redacted]

25X1 Unlike the FARC and the M-19, the EPL barely has maintained even the pretense of forsaking the armed struggle. Rather, it has played an obstructionist role in negotiations with the government by mixing threats to return to full-scale warfare with frequent public criticism of Betancur's peace program. Last winter the EPL withdrew from the national dialogue "indefinitely," publicly citing an alleged lack of seriousness on the government's part and military harassment of the group's members. [redacted]

25X1 We agree with the US Embassy's assessment that in coming months the group probably will remain on the negotiating sidelines, rejoining the national dialogue only if its leaders conclude that progress has occurred that is particularly beneficial to the organization. We believe that no one in the EPL's hierarchy is seriously considering participating in the 1986 elections. Instead, [redacted]

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[redacted]
the EPL is only participating in the peace process in order to help assure that its lucrative terrorist operations are relatively free from interference by government security forces. [redacted]

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The Army of National Liberation (ELN)

Among the four insurgent groups, only the ELN has not entered into a cease-fire accord with the Betancur regime. Funding needs may in part explain their decision to stand alone. [redacted]

[redacted] its
military setbacks during the 1970s and a general retrenchment in Cuba's policy of subversion caused Havana to withdraw its support. In its place, the organization apparently has turned increasingly to

dealings with Colombia's narcotics traffickers. [redacted]
[redacted] reported last summer, for example, that Army troops captured 24 ELN guerrillas guarding a cache of marijuana with a street value in excess of \$200,000. [redacted]

More than just finances are behind the group's refusing to agree to any cease-fire. Over the last two years the ELN has revised its basic strategy in a manner that precluded the movement from signing a cease-fire accord with the government. In mid-1983, the ELN's national directorate approved an ambitious plan that envisioned overtaking its two larger rivals—the M-19 and the FARC—by late 1985 or early 1986, according to the US Embassy. Ultimately, the ELN

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hoped to spark a mass uprising that would culminate in the creation of a new revolutionary government, but a series of public relations blunders cost the movement any chance of achieving a substantial increase in popular support. Most notably, in November 1983 an ELN-directed kidnapping of President Betancur's brother, which we believe was designed to demonstrate the group's power, instead sparked unprecedented public criticism. []

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We judge that ELN leaders, stung by the failure of their efforts, opted to continue the armed struggle in hopes that in so doing they would have an advantage in attracting violence-prone activists. The group's revolutionary commitment probably will prevent it from altering its policy for the remainder of Betancur's term. In view of its penchant for going after US diplomats and US business facilities and employees, we believe that the ELN probably is the greatest threat to US interests of any insurgent organization in Colombia today. []

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The Military's Role

In our view, Colombia's armed forces play a dual role in the peace process. As the administration's main bulwark against the insurgents, the institution is the prime guarantor of civil order. At the same time, the military is the single most important brake on Betancur and, as such, indirectly defines how far he can take his peace initiatives. []

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Although the military has fought rural insurgents since they first took up arms against the government, it has not been able to bring them to heel. This is due, we believe, largely to a number of handicaps that greatly reduce the institution's operational effectiveness. The 57,000-man Army is hampered by rugged terrain to which the guerrillas have long since adapted and in which they operate freely. The absence of a well-developed ground transportation system and shortage of aircraft—particularly modern helicopters and transports—restricts the access of military units to remote areas and hinders the resupply of men in the field, [] The close air support operations that do take place often are severely circumscribed by the age and inadequacy of much of the Air Force's equipment and by a lack of trained forward air controllers, []

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Weaponry in general is frequently obsolete and difficult to maintain because of the variety of models, makes, and origins, []

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Drastic budget cuts are compounding the military's operational difficulties. []

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[] the overall 1985 defense budget has been cut by 35 percent. []

[] this already has led to shortages of clothing, gasoline, and ammunition for troops in combat and forced a postponement of needed equipment repairs. Similar problems are plaguing the Air Force's helicopter fleet, which is often used to support ground forces in their encounters with the insurgents. Indeed, only about a third of the Air Force's 64 helicopters are operational and very few of these would be considered safe by US standards. []

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From a political perspective, the military's responsibility to protect Colombia from the insurgent threat also gives it a voice in Betancur's peace initiatives.

The prevailing view in the military, []

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[] is that the insurgents are using the opportunity to rest and regroup—at a time when the Colombian military's capabilities are suffering due to budget cuts—and that they will be stronger than ever when full-scale fighting resumes. According to the US Embassy, some senior officers argue that at the beginning of Betancur's term the military finally had all the insurgent groups except the FARC under control despite the logistic difficulties the armed forces faced. In the view of these officers, therefore, the truce has cost the military a major tactical advantage. There is also widespread resentment in the armed forces that many insurgent leaders freed under Betancur's program—some of whom took years to capture—have since rejoined their old combat units. []

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Nevertheless, early criticism of the President's peace program by the military has given way to public expressions of support, coupled with stern warnings to the insurgents to abide by the cease-fire. We believe that this reflects in part the armed forces' firm support of the country's democratic tradition, which has seen the military intervene in the political process

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only once this century. In addition, we believe Betancur's decision to sack the Minister of Defense in January 1984 following his public criticism of the President's peace efforts almost certainly left an indelible impact on the high command. [REDACTED]

For his part, Betancur—a veteran politician who was forced into exile after the Army's coup in 1953—almost certainly is acutely aware of the need to avoid unnecessarily provoking the military. He has tried to preserve harmony by publicly praising the armed forces on numerous occasions for their role in preserving law and order. The President has also reassured the military by supporting counterinsurgency operations against those guerrilla groups that refuse to come to terms with the government and, [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] by giving the Army a green light to attack any insurgents who blatantly violate the truce. Finally, he has consistently refused rebel demands for a withdrawal of the military from regions dominated by the guerrillas, [REDACTED]

Beyond the armed forces' respect for the political process, however, we believe there are practical motives for the military to acquiesce in the peace process. The high command probably judges—correctly, in our view—that the military's stature will be enhanced if the insurgents break the truce. Growing public anger over insurgent violations of the cease-fire accords already is fostering a more sympathetic view of the armed forces and their mission, according to the US Embassy and the Colombian press. A collapse of the truce probably would further strengthen the military's image by vindicating its earlier contention that the insurgents do not genuinely desire peace. [REDACTED]

The Party Perspective

The military's assessment of the peace process finds support in both major parties, but the US Embassy reports that most civilian politicians have hesitated to state their views publicly. Because many Liberal party leaders called for a blanket amnesty for the insurgents when their party was in office, they have apparently found it difficult to fault the incumbent administration for pursuing a similar tack. The US Embassy reports that the Liberals are now divided between

those who favor continued dialogue with the insurgents and others who argue for a tougher government line in negotiating with the guerrillas and sterner measures against subversion. [REDACTED]

The US Embassy notes many Conservatives also do not support the current peace process, but they have remained silent to preserve party unity. [REDACTED]

Prospects

Over the Near Term

We believe that there is a slightly better-than-even chance that the current pseudopeace will hold for the next several months, but prospects for the truces to collapse will steadily increase, in our view, as the end of Betancur's term in August 1986 approaches. [REDACTED]

Despite his commitment to sustaining the peace process, we believe Betancur probably has offered the guerrillas all the inducements he can politically afford. Determination by Congress to protect its legislative prerogatives already has restricted the President's ability to grant concessions to the rebels, and Colombia's worsening economic situation almost certainly will further hamstring proposals for rural development programs.² [REDACTED]

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[] The presidential and congressional election campaigns next year probably will further limit Betancur's flexibility as opposition politicians try to exploit the electorate's growing disenchantment with the President's failure to bring a halt to violence. []

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Cooperation between the various insurgent organizations and domestic narcotics traffickers also poses a potential threat to the cease-fire agreements. The murder in April 1984 of Colombia's Minister of Justice—almost certainly by the drug mafia—caused Betancur to launch an unprecedented campaign against the country's illicit narcotics industry. His decision to put the military at the forefront of the new enforcement effort has strengthened the prospect that government forces may come into conflict with guerrillas working in league with the traffickers. This possibility is most pronounced in areas such as Caqueta where units of the FARC, according to the US Embassy, are paid by drug dealers to protect their fields and processing factories. []

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We believe the chance that this or any other armed encounter may escalate to a point that would imperil the truce is increased by the military's underlying skepticism about the truce and its interpretation of its continuing mission. []

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[] the military not only hopes to take advantage of its new role as an antinarcotics force to attack the insurgents but also plans to take no prisoners for fear that another presidential amnesty will be granted that would free the rebels to fight again. []

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[] The most dangerous threat to the accords, however, stems from a decision in April by the high command, [] to seek a confrontation with a large guerrilla force in order to inflict a major defeat on the rebels that would either force them to negotiate in earnest or formally break the truce. []

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From the insurgents' perspective, the longer the truce lasts the better the opportunity to regroup, proselytize, and build support networks. Nonetheless, we doubt that a long-term cessation of hostilities will

prevail because the insurgents' revolutionary goals are unchanged. Moreover, we believe that, because of ideological conviction, preference for a life of combat, or fear of retribution by their comrades, few guerrilla cadre are attracted by government entreaties to surrender their weapons. Moreover, the vast majority of guerrilla leaders probably doubt that they could compete successfully for office against the more experienced members of the traditional parties. []

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Other evidence points to a risky truce as well. According to the US Embassy, militants in each of the guerrilla groups are showing increasing impatience with the government's lack of progress in responding to insurgent demands for sweeping socioeconomic and political reforms. They probably also point to efforts by the government to restrict such rebel propaganda extravaganzas as the M-19's proposed national congress last February as indicative of the diminishing benefits of the truce. We judge that another critical short-term question affecting whether the insurgents choose to resume full-scale armed struggle is how far the armed forces are prepared to go in adopting more aggressive tactics. The FARC, in our view, probably would be the most reluctant to abandon the truce because of its leaders' purported desire to establish a legal political front capable of competing with the two traditional parties. Nevertheless, even that organization would likely return to full-fledged guerrilla war if the military moves decisively against its base areas. []

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We believe the military would be able to contain a renewed outbreak of insurgency if the pre-cease-fire situation were reestablished, with guerrilla groups operating independently. Nevertheless, the armed forces would be at an initial disadvantage because of guerrilla recruitment and reorganizational efforts throughout the cease-fire period as well as the budgetary cuts the armed forces are absorbing. Counterbalancing these negative factors would be the strong public support for tough counterinsurgency measures that almost certainly would accompany the breakdown of the truce. In any case, the resumption of full-scale guerrilla warfare probably would doom any "peace through dialogue" initiatives for years to come

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because Betancur's successor—regardless of which party he represents—would be compelled by public opinion to move aggressively against the guerrillas.

Chances for Guerrilla Unity

There is an outside chance—perhaps 1 in 10—that those guerrilla groups that are now party to the various accords not only would return to full-scale warfare but also would unite in a centrally coordinated organization. We view such a development as remote because similar attempts in the past all foundered due to ideological differences and power rivalries among insurgent leaders. Such divisiveness has not abated in recent months.

despite continuing unity efforts by the FARC and the Communist Party. In our view, broad-based insurgent cooperation probably would come about only if most moderates in the four key movements either were pushed aside or agreed to accept the government's peace terms. In such an event, hardliners would be left in control, and they—like their counterparts in several dissident splinter groups—might be more receptive to coordinating operational plans. A gradual expansion of already existing cooperation between the various insurgent groups at the local level probably would be a key indicator that such a significant change in overall rebel organization and strategy was beginning to occur.

We judge that the military would be hard pressed to contain an amalgamated insurgent organization, especially if the new hardline-dominated rebel entity struck a deal with the narcotics mafia. The armed forces' lack of mobility would be a major handicap as it struggled to fight a multifront battle against a well-funded, well-armed, and rested guerrilla organization. The most likely result would be a loss of central government authority in many rural areas. The government also would face a formidable terrorist challenge in urban areas. Moreover, such a consolidation of guerrilla forces would fulfill a longstanding Cuban policy objective and might prompt Havana to increase its assistance to the rebels significantly, even at the risk of destroying the friendship that has arisen over the past three years between Betancur and Castro and with it the rapidly improving prospects for normalizing diplomatic relations with Bogota.

Implications for the United States

Notwithstanding Betancur's peace efforts, terrorism in Colombia has become an increasing threat to US interests. The Embassy believes that a splinter group of the FARC was responsible for a bombing in the parking lot of the US Embassy in May 1984, and, the ELN enlisted the support of other terrorist organizations last summer for a possible attack against the US Ambassador.

Several insurgent groups have carried out terrorist attacks in recent months against US companies in various Colombian cities. US citizens also have been victims of guerrilla-sponsored kidnaping efforts. Such acts occasionally have been designed to protest US policies in Latin America, but more often they have been staged to raise money for needed arms and equipment, according to the US Embassy.

At a minimum, US Mission personnel will be increasingly at risk if the cease-fire unravels.

We share the US Embassy's judgment that, in a more general sense, an intensification of terrorism by the radical left would threaten economic stability. In our view, the collapse of the truce would result in intensified targeting of US businessmen as the insurgents sought quickly to raise additional funds. It probably also would accelerate a trend begun in 1983 when, in response to M-19 threats against multinational corporations, several major US firms began withdrawing management personnel. Finally, a return to full-scale guerrilla war probably would discourage US companies from new or expanded investment, a development that would undercut a valuable source of new funding.

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On the domestic side an intensification of guerrilla-sponsored kidnaping and extortion threats would certainly tempt some Colombian entrepreneurs to transfer their assets abroad or even to flee the country. This, in turn, would fuel unemployment, which, at 14 percent, is already at unprecedented levels, and slow economic growth even further than the roughly 2-percent rate that private forecasters projected for 1985. As far as political stability is concerned, an intensification of insurgent attacks could also prove a real setback. The US Embassy, for example, notes that a failure of Betancur's peace plan probably would further erode public confidence in the government's ability to protect its citizenry. It might also increase public apathy and contribute to the trend—noted by academic observers and the Colombian press—of declining participation in the political system.

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